

THE JOURNEY TOWARD WHOLENESS

by

The Faith, Fellowship, and Order Commission

1989

The Faith, Fellowship, and Order Commission has learned much about sexuality and spirituality through its workshops, its process of grassroots theology from the people, and its theological reflection within the meetings of its diverse members. Because we have come together primarily out of a shared experience of oppression as gay and lesbian people, we have a unique grasp of the need for a theology of sexuality which brings together our sexuality and our spirituality. We would like to share with you some of our observations, and suggest issues for continuing reflection among our people as we grow together in Christian community.

The UFMCC is one of the few churches in modern times which has had the courage to openly talk about sexuality. Nevertheless, it has often been quite difficult for people to discuss sex in a church setting. This may be due to sex-negative teachings in childhood, or simply due to the typical silence surrounding sexual topics in home and church. Discussion of gay and lesbian sexuality may have been especially unacceptable because of negative attitudes toward the homosexual orientation.

When open discussion of sex is expected in a church setting, people need to be given permission to talk openly, and they need encouragement to feel that they are safe and will not be judged. Areas of difficulty tend to be different for men and women. Men may have greater difficulty expressing their feelings and emotions regarding sex. Women tend to find conversation concerning body parts and explicit sexual activity a problem area.

In God's world there is a great diversity. We in human society tend to be uncomfortable with diversity. We want to label and control things to artificially limit what we consider to be acceptable. We seem to abhor ambiguity and cling to certainty, even when it is unnatural and unrealistic. Just as we are not totally defined by our sexual orientation or religious affiliation, so it is not realistic to confine people to labels. We seem to be on various continua with regard to sexual behaviors, fantasy, intimacy, etc. In UFMCC we embrace the asexual, bisexual, homosexual, heterosexual, and others which do not fit even in these categories.

In UFMCC, with the diversity of people and experience that we attract, people are exposed to a variety of sexualities and spiritualities. People learn that this diversity is not only OK, but also good and desirable. This leads to discovering a diversity of sexual ethics, embracing responsible sexual behavior, which may be expressed in celibacy, monogamy, serial monogamy, open relationships with or without holy union, and sexual expression among single persons.

The impact of AIDS has caused other ethical questions to arise, since sexual encounters have the potential for becoming life-threatening. New conflicts between sexual needs and ethical values have arisen. Questions of self-worth and self-image can plague persons who have become HIV+. Individuals may need to reevaluate how they want to live in the world. A person's relationship to God may change when they find out that they are infected with HIV. People need to take seriously the fact that their behavior may threaten their own or somebody else's life. Ethics become very important in the time of AIDS.



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As a church, as a people, and as individuals, we are on a journey through life. We can look at our process of maturation as a story or a journey that takes our whole lives. It is a journey of coming home to the wholeness which God envisioned for us even before we were born.

Theology in MCC is a dynamic process which encourages the coming together of the theologies of individual members. Individuals bring their own unique understanding of God, and their relationship to God into the experience of MCC. Individuals' theologies are ever changing as they continue on their spiritual journeys. God is revealed through the Holy Spirit as individuals study and reflect on their relationships with God. Spirituality is deepened as individuals seek and find answers to their spiritual questions. Out of this search more and deeper questions arise.

FFO has been important in helping MCC members to move on in our spiritual journeys and develop our ever changing theology. Comparing timelines of spirituality and sexuality in FFO workshops has given us insights into our journeys as gay and lesbian people. The life journey is a movement from dependency on others to an independent mature adulthood. Because our early lives have often been characterized by abuse, negative family experiences, and rejecting social and church environments, many gay and lesbian people need to move beyond their victimization through a process of healing, and into the reality of wholeness as human beings made in the image of God.

There is a need for sexual healing which includes an acceptance of one's sexuality, a freedom to become fully sexual in the ways most meaningful and healthful for the individual, and an integration of sexuality into the whole person. There is also a need for spiritual healing which requires movement away from harsh, judgmental images of God that are often based on parental treatment, to the positive experience of a loving and accepting God.

God created within us the right, capability and expectation of wholeness. Sexuality and spirituality are two of the gifts that God has given us to complete that wholeness. Our journeys have starts and stops, detours and road blocks. One fork in the road for many of us is the choice between sexuality and spirituality that we feel we must make when we discover our sexuality. Often the discovery of MCC serves as a catalyst that allows us to bring our spirituality and sexuality back together as parts of our wholeness. Reflecting on our timelines has given us insight into the changes and events in our lives that have affected our journeys toward wholeness.

It is important that we not be quick to label the sexuality of other persons or the quality of their spirituality. We are more than the sum of our experiences because we also include the potential for wholeness that God has created within us. Labels cannot adequately describe us at any one time, and they could never begin to describe our potential for wholeness.

We are a church of reconciliation. And in seeking this reconciliation, the healing of our whole selves, including our sexual, emotional, and spiritual parts, must be a continuous process in MCC. As the body of Christ for many gay and lesbian people, we are part of the process of transformation from oppression and victimization to healing and wholeness. Through our ministry to individuals and to our people as a whole, we enable gay and lesbian people to claim their full heritage as sons and daughters of God.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HIV/AIDS IN THE UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

By Rev. A. Stephen Pieters

November, 1993

1983: FIRST STIRRINGS ABOUT AIDS AT A GENERAL CONFERENCE

The first stirrings of consciousness about HIV/AIDS in the Fellowship at large happened in July, 1983, at General Conference XI in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, when two resolutions about AIDS were passed. Resolution #11, offered by MCC in the Valley, No. Hollywood, CA, reads:

"Recognizing our responsibilities as a community of believers, we do now declare our support for those individuals with AIDS: that we affirm to them, as well as their spouses, families and friends, our readiness to give assistance and comfort to them in whatever ways possible.

"Recognizing the value and importance of human contact within any community, we, the UFMCC, pledge that, collectively and individually, we will offer our staffs and congregations to those who suffer pain and despair as a result of this condition; that we will offer comfort through hope; that we will bring communion and prayer; that we will assist in alleviating any and all problems through the sharing of the love of God wherever and whenever possible."

Resolution #12, offered by the Board of Elders, read:

"BE IT RESOLVED that the UFMCC, recognizing the interrelated nature of wellness of mind, body and spirit and the historic responsibility of the Church of Jesus Christ to pastor, educate, and militate (where necessary)) shall, as a body, respond to the AIDS crisis in a variety of ways:

"1) PASTORAL CARE AND LEADERSHIP - This may be the area of greatest need and our greatest gifts. The UFMCC and its clergy and its congregations shall prepare ourselves to provide active pastoral care for persons with AIDS, and persons impacted by the AIDS crisis (significant persons in the life of the person with AIDS, and the helping persons involved). This care will be on a one to one basis and in the form of support groups. We know that it is God's will that NO person suffer alone and isolated. Further, we commit ourselves to address the urgent spiritual issues arising from illness and death - including unresolved guilt, fear, self-hatred and internalized homophobia.

"And further, we commit ourselves to be vigilant, outspoken opponents of any theology that even suggests that any disease is God's divine earthly retribution against any individual or group; and we resolve to preach, teach, and proclaim God's loving, healing power and desire for our health and happiness.

"To this end, we ask that Faith, Fellowship, and order Commission consider part of its agenda to help us address the theological issues involved; and

"That the Spiritual Life and Clergy Care Program and its Chaplains become proficient in pastoral care in the AIDS crisis as a resource for us all.

"2) EDUCATION - The UFMCC and its local churches will provide continuing accessible education regarding AIDS and other health-related issues in a sex-positive, gay-positive and wellness-positive manner to members of the Fellowship, and the communities in which we live.

"To this end, we ask that Samaritan Education Ministries, in cooperation with the Fellowship Offices and publications, provide resources for such education.

"In addition, the Board of Elders will explore options for the efficient and reliable flow of accurate information regarding AIDS.

"3) POLITICAL ACTIVISM - The UFMCC and its member churches will actively participate in educating elected officials on the local, regional and national levels regarding the AIDS crisis, including (but not limited to) monies for research, legal issues and availability of government administrated services, especially for Third World persons who are disproportionately hurt by this epidemic.

"4) SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY - The UFMCC and its local churches will begin asking some difficult but important questions about sexuality and social responsibility that the AIDS crisis elicits. We especially urge our gay brothers clergy and lay, to spend time discussing the facts, the fears, the feelings and the options for responsible sexual relating during this health crisis. Further, we urge our whole fellowship to reject the heartless social "Pariah-ing" of persons with AIDS (or suspected of having AIDS) and their friends and families.

"Finally we also call for the formation of a lesbian blood bank in the name of UFMCC for the use of persons with AIDS, which the Board of Elders will take steps to initiate.

"BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that implementation of this resolution shall be a priority issue at every level in the Fellowship."

At that General Conference, there were no persons who were openly diagnosed with AIDS, although one member of the clergy house, Rev. Steve Pieters, had been diagnosed in 1982 with what was then called "pre-AIDS," or "ARC." In those days, before the discovery of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and before the test for antibodies to HIV, most people within UFMCC did not yet know anyone with AIDS, and they were able to regard AIDS as something that happened to someone else. Some leaders of the Fellowship later confessed their own denial about AIDS, citing how they even believed in 1983 that Rev. Pieters was "faking it." Nonetheless, pastors of MCC's in major urban centers in the United States and Canada were already beginning to do funerals for people with AIDS, primarily for persons outside their congregations.

1984: FIRST DIAGNOSIS AMONG THE CLERGY

At the Clergy Conference in Kansas City, MO, in March, 1984, Rev. T. Edward Helms led the first Fellowship-level workshop on AIDS, where Rev. Helms shared the expertise he had acquired from working with people with AIDS in Baltimore, MD. A handful of clergy attended the workshop.

In April, 1984, Rev. Steve Pieters was diagnosed with Kaposi's Sarcoma, lymphoma, and AIDS, becoming the first clergyperson in the Fellowship to be diagnosed with AIDS. When

he preached the Easter sermon at MCC in the Valley two weeks later, he was the first to coin the phrase, "God is greater than AIDS." This slogan was soon seen on buttons and banners all over the Fellowship and beyond.

Ms. Paula Schoenwether, then the editor of the Fellowship monthly magazine, "Journey," invited Rev. Pieters to write an article about his experiences with AIDS for Journey Magazine. This article, the first acknowledgment about AIDS in a Fellowship publication, became a regular monthly feature, and served to raise the consciousness of many people within the Fellowship. Rev. Elder Troy Perry later remarked that many people had to change their minds about who AIDS was affecting when Rev. Pieters was diagnosed: he did not fall into any of the categories that people at that time were assuming were at most risk for AIDS, i.e., the leather community, or those who were known for having multiple sexual partners in the years prior to AIDS.

Pieters wrote in his second article in "Journey," "I don't like the way AIDS screams out at me from the page... Why give it any more power by capitalizing every letter in the word?... I'm not going to capitalize it anymore. I don't want to diminish the seriousness of the situation; I want to diminish the alarmism and the fear surrounding the disease. Not 'AIDS', but 'aids.'" This use of "aids" in place of "AIDS" was soon adopted by many people both within and outside the Fellowship.

1985: THE FIRST GENERAL CONFERENCE AIDS FORUM

At General Conference XII, July, 1985, in Sacramento, CA, there were two people with AIDS: Rev. Pieters, and Dean Sandmire, one of the co-founders of Mobilization against AIDS, and a well-known member of Golden Gate MCC in San Francisco. Thursday of conference week was reserved for AIDS awareness and education of the Fellowship. Since it was the only day off from business meetings, only about 100 people stayed for the series of lectures, panels, and workshops. Rev. Pieters, who delivered the keynote address that day, recalls "A number of clergy and lay delegates, some of whom who were later diagnosed with AIDS themselves, approached me to say that they really needed a day off, and they didn't have any persons with AIDS in their congregations anyway." Sandmire and Pieters spent time during this conference strategizing on how to break through the massive denial that seemed to exist among many MCCer's.

The Sacramento General Conference voted to create the General Council, made up of the Board of Elders and all District Coordinators. Meanwhile, Rev. Ed Helms, Rev. Pieters, and Rev. Sherre Boothman discussed the need for a Fellowship-level response to AIDS. Rev. Helms approached the Board of Elders with a proposal for an office of AIDS Ministry, complete with a funding proposal, which was signed by twelve other clergy. The Board of Elders took the proposal under advisement, and issued an addendum to the General Conference Reports and Directives.

This addendum read in part, "The Board of Elders has been struggling with what the Fellowship can and should be doing to respond [to the AIDS crisis]. We don't want to duplicate other efforts, but to lead our Church in our responses of faith and service. The

pressures of time, planning, and budget processes create frustrations. There is a danger in acting too hastily in creating a poorly planned and under-funded program. At the same time, the urgency of the crisis demands immediate attention and intervention." The program design offered in the addendum called for training and support of leadership, using existing programs such as Samaritan, FFO, CCCC, and the Spiritual Life and Clergy Care Center, as well as "information dissemination and program sharing."

A timeline in the addendum called for the training of Elders and other leadership in death and dying, preparation of a 1986 Epiphany Program on AIDS ministry, and encouraging "all Districts to deal with AIDS at their next District Conference." The timeline projected activities for 1986 to include designing specific programs, preparing grant applications, as well as soliciting grants from foundations and churches, in order to raise \$10,000 for a Fellowship AIDS Ministry program.

At this same General Conference, UFMCC made news in both the gay and mainstream media, when Rev. Elder Troy Perry announced at the opening press conference that the one UFMCC clergyperson with AIDS, Rev. Steve Pieters, had gone into complete remission, taking suramin, the first experimental antiretroviral drug tried against HIV. This news had not been released at that time, because the researchers were waiting to see if they could replicate these results in other patients, and they had not published about suramin in any medical journal. After the story appeared, people with AIDS all over the United States tried desperately to get into the suramin trials. These trials were closed by the end of 1985, with the researchers' conclusion that the drug was too toxic for further use in people with HIV/AIDS.

At the first General Council meeting, in October, 1985, action on AIDS programming was delayed to the second meeting of the General Council, in March, 1986, in order to consult with all program unit Chairs. It was noted in the minutes that the proposed \$10,000 had not been received. Appointment of a Task Force on AIDS was also delayed until the next meeting.

1986: THE FIRST AIDS VIGIL OF PRAYER

Rev. David Farrell, pastor of MCC San Diego, led the first AIDS Vigil of Prayer in January, 1986. People living with AIDS were featured prominently as musicians, readers, and speakers in the 50-hour Vigil. Rev. Farrell mounted a very successful media campaign for the event, and he invited every church in San Diego to participate. A number of churches responded, making it one of the first interfaith AIDS events in the world. Rev. Farrell created a packet of information on how to do an AIDS Vigil, which was distributed throughout the Fellowship. The entire Fellowship began to hold AIDS Vigils of Prayer modeled after the MCC San Diego Vigil within the year. These have become annual events throughout the world.

At the March, 1986 meeting of the General Council, a meeting was authorized to bring together program directors Loni Allen, Sherre Boothman, Steve Pieters, Jeffrey Pulling, and Nancy Radclyffe, with Council member Mary Moore as Chair. The committee's purpose

was to design an "AIDS programming schedule to begin June 1, 1986 and run through General Conference 1987, including a detailed description for a full-time coordinator of AIDS ministry, to be approved by the Program and Budget division of the General Council," and to "raise funding necessary to implement AIDS ministry budget." The committee was authorized to seek funding with the approval of Program and Budget, and to hire a coordinator when funds became available. The coordinator was to "function under the direct supervision of the Moderator of the Board of Elders." The committee met, but discovered that with no budget, and no funds coming in, it was impossible to implement any sort of Fellowship-wide AIDS programming.

Also in 1986, Rev. Ron Russell-Coons, the pastor of MCC Seattle, was diagnosed with AIDS, becoming the first clergyperson to be diagnosed while pastoring a church. Rev. Russell-Coons made the decision to retire from his pulpit and move to San Francisco with his spouse, Mr. Chuck Russell-Coons, where he served on staff at MCC San Francisco until his death in 1990. Ron had a tremendous impact on the Fellowship through the painful experience of discovering how many of our churches were not prepared to deal with a pastor with a life-threatening illness. Because of his experience, many churches began to explore disability policies for their employees; and many Boards of Directors began to struggle with the difficult issues of AIDS in the workplace.

At the October, 1986 General Council meeting, the Council voted "that UFMCC AIDS Program not be initiated because of lack of funding and lack of coordinated efforts among the various programs responding." It was noted that "the cessation of this program will have no impact on the Fellowship's response to the issues surrounding AIDS." This action of the General Council caused a great deal of reaction, particularly from persons living with AIDS. One General Council member argued, "AIDS Ministry is happening at the local level, so why do we need a Fellowship level AIDS Ministry?" Rev. Pieters replied, "Church administration happens on a local level, so by that logic, why do we need a General Council?" The General Council received a great deal of feedback on this issue from concerned persons all over the Fellowship, with the result that the issue came up again at the March, 1987 meeting of the General Council.

1987: UFMCC AIDS MINISTRY CREATED BY THE BOARD OF ELDERS

In March, 1987, the General Council authorized the Board of Elders to develop an AIDS program, under the auspices and budget of the Board of Elders. However, the Elders' action on this item was delayed until the October March on Washington.

General Conference XIII, held in Miami, FL, in July, 1987, was the first General Conference where a gathering was held for persons with AIDS. At this conference, there were eight persons with AIDS who came to the group, which was held late in the week. We told each other our stories and gained strength from being with each other. However, there was little political consciousness among us, in terms of how we might get something going around AIDS on a Fellowship level. One MCC pastor who came into MCC from the political movements of the sixties, said, "You people in the younger generation just don't know how to get things done on the top levels. Unfortunately, you're the ones getting AIDS."

However, the growing impact of AIDS on the Fellowship was still recognized in several ways at this conference. Rev. Elder Troy Perry opened the Conference by showing the videotape of Tammy Faye Bakker interviewing Rev. Steve Pieters about being a person with AIDS. A memorial Service was held one evening, where people streamed forward with names of loved ones who had died of AIDS, and placed the names on a memorial wall. This was the first time that the Fellowship was confronted with the vast numbers of people who had already died. The service became a massive opportunity to grieve as a world-wide community of faith.

One of the high points for many people at the '87 Conference was when Rev. Pieters, who was supposed to have died before 1985, was tearfully ordained by the Board of Elders. This moment was made particularly memorable when Rev. Pieters' mother, who along with his father stood with him for his ordination, completed the ordination by tapping him on the head with a fairy wand. A more somber reminder of AIDS happened when Rev. Emmett Watkins was rushed to the hospital towards the end of the week with an attack of pneumocystis carinii pneumonia.

In October, 1987, the Board of Elders met at the historic March on Washington. At that meeting, they created the UFMCC AIDS Ministry as a program of the Board of Elders. They appointed Rev. Elder Don Eastman as Executive Director, and Rev. Steve Pieters as Field Director. Rev. Eastman was already working fulltime at the Fellowship offices, and Rev. Pieters was hired at \$200 a month, and worked out of his home. Rev. Pieters immediately began traveling around the Fellowship, sharing his testimony, preaching, and teaching about living with AIDS. The first issue of ALERT, the UFMCC monthly newsletter on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment was published in November, 1987, with Rev. Pieters as the editor.

1988: UFMCC HELPS ORGANIZE ANIN

In January of 1987, Rev. Elder Don Eastman began to participate in a series of informal meetings on AIDS with representatives of several other national religious organizations in the U.S., including the United Church of Christ, the American Jewish Committee and the Unitarian Universalist Association. It was clear that the powerful voices of fear and bigotry from the religious right on AIDS issues were being met only with silence from other faith communities.

The meeting led to the creation of the AIDS National Interfaith Network (ANIN) at Rye, NY, in April, 1988. Rev. Elder Eastman, one of the founding members at that meeting, was elected as the first chairperson of ANIN's Board of Directors, and served in that capacity until September, 1990. Rev. A. Stephen Pieters was also elected to the ANIN Board in April, 1988. Both continue to serve on ANIN's Board of Directors and Rev. Pieters is on the Executive Committee as Secretary.

ANIN has provided one of the few full-time AIDS lobbyists in Washington, D.C., as well as co-sponsoring the annual U.S. National Skills Building Conference. UFMCC's participation in ANIN is a primary way the Fellowship fights for legislation like the Americans with

Disabilities Act, and fights against the ban on immigration for persons living with HIV.

Also in 1988, UFMCC AIDS Ministry held its first AIDS Conference, in conjunction with the clergy conference in Houston, TX. About 70 people attended the AIDS conference, which was made particularly memorable by the powerful preaching of Rev. Ron Russell-Coons and Rev. Jeri Ann Harvey.

1989: AIDS FORUM CHANGES UFMCC BUDGET

General Conference XIV, in St. Paul, MN in July, 1989, was a true turning point in the Fellowship's response to AIDS. The pamphlet, "Spiritual Strength for Survival," written by Rev. Pieters, was introduced at this conference. The first AIDS luncheon was held in St. Paul, and featured Rev. Lou Kavar, the author of a new book on AIDS ministry. For the first time, support groups for persons with AIDS were held on several evenings of the conference, and a rest area for persons with AIDS or any life-threatening illness was opened. The number of persons with HIV and AIDS had risen since the last General Conference to about 30.

One of the most memorable experiences of the entire conference was the unplanned AIDS Forum, held Friday morning in the midst of elections for the Board of Elders. A number of clergy and lay delegates had been quite disturbed by the lack of any focus on AIDS in the business meetings. There was a great deal of anger expressed during the support groups for people with AIDS, that the Fellowship seemed to be oblivious to our issues. Rev. Brent Hawkes, pastor of MCC Toronto, moved that there be an AIDS Forum on Friday morning, to give opportunity to persons affected by AIDS to speak to the entire conference. Rev. Elder Eastman and Rev. Pieters were charged with organizing the hour-long format. The speakers were chosen, with an intent to represent the international diversity of our Fellowship, as well as the diversity of ways that AIDS is experienced by people in our Fellowship: as persons with AIDS and HIV, as caregivers, and as parishioners whose pastors have AIDS.

Wednesday night, at the HIV/AIDS group meeting, the conversation turned to the upcoming AIDS Forum, after stories began to surface of people with AIDS confronting the denial and the fears of their congregations, their pastors, and their parishioners. The group felt they had to use the forum Friday morning to get the Fellowship to snap out of collective denial and act on the crisis. Ideas were thrown back and forth, and a basic plan was decided on. The plan evolved over the next 36 hours, as people came up with other ideas and others began to offer support for the group's plan.

Friday morning, the AIDS Forum was held directly after the first ballot to elect Elders. The Conference floor was filled. The speakers showed in passionate, angry, and faith-filled words, the amazing diversity of living with HIV/AIDS. The speakers were Rev. Ron Russell-Coons, Mr. Michael Moffatt, Rev. Emmett Watkins, Rev. Robert Pierce, and Rev. Steve Pieters, all of whom were diagnosed with HIV or AIDS, as well as caregivers Rev. Hong Tan, Ms. Lynn Griffis, and Ms. Kay Folsom-Neill, who was a member of MCC Seattle when Rev. Russell-Coons had been diagnosed.

In order to demonstrate the impact that HIV/AIDS is having on our Fellowship, Rev. Pieters asked all of the persons with AIDS who were present to rise as they were able. About ten people stood. All the people who are HIV positive were asked to rise, and another 15 to 20 people stood, including some who had never before publicly identified themselves. Many were stunned to see the Rev. Elder Jeri Ann Harvey rise at this point. She became the first woman living with HIV to be publicly identified in the Fellowship. But out of an audience including about 1,000 gay men and lesbians, there were obviously a number of infected people who did not rise. It was noted that this was not a reflection on those infected, but on the atmosphere of fear and denial that had been allowed to exist in the Fellowship.

All the people with AIDS and HIV were asked to step to the back of the room, so the Conference could contemplate our empty chairs. Those who wanted to represent someone who had already died were invited to rise, speak the name, and join us in the back of the room.

About ninety per cent of the seats were vacated as we all stood at the back, looking at the empty chairs. People wept and rocked in each other's arms. There was speaking in tongues and interpretation. The Rev. Larry Uhrig, pastor of MCC Washington, D.C., started back down the aisle with a \$50 bill, which he announced he was donating towards funding the UFMCC AIDS Ministry. Everybody followed, singing, "God Be My Shelter," pulling cash out of their pockets and piling it up at the foot of the Moderator's podium. Over \$5,800 was raised that morning.

The next day, an amended budget was passed, funding the Field Director of AIDS Ministry on a full-time basis, beginning January 1, 1990. Rev. Elder Freda Smith sacrificed her planned full-time salary as an Elder to provide for this salary. However, it would not be until February, 1992, that an office was provided at Fellowship headquarters for the Field Director.

The other major event for UFMCC AIDS Ministry in 1989 took place at the Carter Center in Atlanta, GA, on World AIDS Day, December 1, 1989. A number of Fellowship leaders attended a conference coordinated by the AIDS National Interfaith Network for the religious leadership of the United States. Rev. Elders Troy Perry, Freda Smith, Don Eastman, and Jeri Ann Harvey, as well as Revs. Steve Pieters, Emmett Watkins, Karen Ziegler, Reid Christensen, and Steve Fund actively participated in creating the Atlanta Declaration at this conference. This was the first document with a positive focus on AIDS that came from U.S. religious leadership.

1990: THE FIRST MAJOR WAVE OF DEATH

The second UFMCC AIDS Ministry conference was held in Orlando, FL. Although the people present gained a great deal from the conference, the poor attendance made the Board of Elders reconsider doing another UFMCC AIDS Ministry conference. Although participants praised both conferences (in 1988 and 1990) for their content, there were not enough people in attendance to warrant continuing the conferences. Since 1990, MCC members have been encouraged to attend the annual National Skills Building Conferences,

sponsored in part by the AIDS National Interfaith Network. UFMCC has always provided leadership at this conference. Rev. Pieters keynoted the conference in 1989, and Rev. Perry keynoted in 1993.

Six clergy and lay leaders had died from HIV/AIDS during the 1980's, but in the summer of 1990, UFMCC was hit with the first major wave of death from AIDS. Between June and August, Revs. Brad Anderson, Ron Bergeron, Jim Harris, Ron Russell-Coons, and Emmett Watkins succumbed to the complications of HIV/AIDS. The latter two died on the same day, on opposite coasts of the United States. Although this kind of death rate would become more common as the pandemic went on, this was the first time there was such a concentration of deaths among the leadership of the Fellowship.

The first UFMCC AIDS survey was sent to every church in the Fellowship during the summer of 1990. A high rate of return indicated the extent to which HIV/AIDS had already affected most of the MCC's around the world.

1991: GENERAL CONFERENCE HIV/AIDS PROGRAMING INCREASES

At the General Conference in Phoenix in 1991, HIV/AIDS programming increased tremendously, as the number of people with HIV/AIDS present increased. A variety of workshops were held in addition to well-attended support groups. "The Living Room," a rest area for persons with life-threatening illnesses, was available.

The AIDS Ministry Luncheon became one of the most popular events of the conference, with TV actress and AIDS activist Alison Arngrim speaking. Ms. Arngrim, best known for her role as Nellie Oleson on the hit series, "Little House on the Prairie," became a very popular speaker at MCC's across the United States. Pastors have reported record attendance for her presentations, stating that people come to meet Nellie Oleson, but they come away knowing a lot more about HIV/AIDS. Alexandra M. Levine, M.D., widely-known HIV/AIDS researcher and clinical physician, delivered the medical update as she had done at the AIDS Conference in Houston in 1988.

1992: AIDS MINISTRY LONG RANGE PLANNING TASK FORCE FIRST MEETS

At its October, 1991 meeting, the General Council approved the creation of a Long Range Planning Task Force for UFMCC AIDS Ministry. The Board of Elders appointed Dr. Lori Dick, Los Angeles, CA., a physician; Mr. Ralph Masek, Santa Ana, CA, a marketing specialist and person living with HIV/AIDS; Rev. Jim Mitulski, San Francisco, CA, Pastor of MCC San Francisco; Ms. Jane Rogers, New Orleans, LA, AIDS Information Coordinator of the South Central District; Mr. Jorge Sosa, Mexico City, DF, Pastoral Leader of ICM Reconciliation; Rev. Paul Tucker, Dallas, TX, Director of Pastoral Care and Discipleship, MCC Dallas; and Mr. Larry Young, Dayton, OH, lay leader and former member of the UFMCC Department of People of Color's Executive Committee, and Rev. Elder Don Eastman, Executive Director of UFMCC AIDS Ministry, who would serve as chair. The Task Force has met several times since its inception, helping to strategize and plan the work of UFMCC AIDS Ministry.

In February, 1992, the Field Director was given an office at UFMCC headquarters in Los Angeles. This has greatly facilitated the production of ALERT, as well as increasing the productivity of the Field Director. This move also helped in the production and tabulation of the second UFMCC AIDS survey, which was sent out in the summer of 1992.

1993: NEW RESOURCES, MORE FOCUS ON LOCAL CHURCH

At General Conference XVI in 1993, also in Phoenix, there were more persons present living with HIV/AIDS than ever before. This was particularly noticeable during the ordination service, when a number of clergy being ordained were visibly ill with the affects of HIV/AIDS. Workshops were more numerous and varied than ever. Support groups for persons living with HIV/AIDS became a daily event. Rev. Ken South, the Executive Director of ANIN, was the speaker for the popular AIDS Ministry Luncheon. Alexandra M. Levine, MD, once again gave the medical update. Near the end of the business meetings, a motion was passed to separate the AIDS Ministry report from the Board of Elders report, so that it could be considered along with all the other Fellowship programs.

The Long Range Planning Task Force met once again after the Conference, and decided that UFMCC AIDS Ministry would concentrate on creating resources for the local church. To this end, a packet of World AIDS Day materials, including liturgies, an Advent series, and an original hymn for lighting the AIDS candle, was sent to every MCC at the end of October. Plans were also made to create a series of manuals on a variety of aspects of AIDS Ministry.

THE WORK OF THE FIELD DIRECTOR

Rev. Pieters has traveled extensively throughout the Fellowship, touring the European North Sea District churches twice, in 1989 and 1992; and attending the World Council of Churches assembly in Canberra, Australia in 1991, as well as preaching at MCC Brisbane and MCC Sydney. Many churches throughout the Fellowship have had the Field Director visit, facilitating AIDS ministry on the local level, doing workshops on living with HIV, healing into death, and doing "good grief," as well as preaching for AIDS Vigils and spiritual renewals.

As one of the longest surviving persons with AIDS in the world, Pieters is also a popular speaker at conferences and support services organizations. He has addressed audiences of HIV-infected prison inmates, medical professionals, high school and college students, and town meetings for AIDS awareness. He has testified before city and county planning councils, as well as before the U.S. National Commission on AIDS.

Rev. Pieters has also represented the Fellowship in numerous appearances in the media. In addition to many local media appearances during his travels, he has been written about in TIME, LIFE, and Omni Magazines, and has been profiled on CNN, *CBS This Morning*, and *Real Life with Jane Pauley*. His story has been told in Chris Glaser's *Come Home*, Troy Perry's *Don't Be Afraid Anymore*, and Michael Callen's *Surviving AIDS*.

The job description for the Field Director, as it has evolved over the years, includes writing and editing ALERT, facilitating and encouraging AIDS Ministry in local churches, developing resources for local churches, and providing a regular pastoral contact for clergy and lay leaders living with HIV/AIDS.

UFMCC RESOURCES FOR HIV/AIDS MINISTRY

Resources for HIV/AIDS Ministry began long before UFMCC AIDS Ministry was created. In the fall of 1984, Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson asked Rev. Pieters to write a pamphlet on AIDS for the Fellowship. This pamphlet, the first Fellowship publication exclusively focusing on AIDS, was called "AIDS: A Christian Response."

In 1985, the Fellowship published "AIDS: Is It God's Judgment?" a pamphlet written by the Faith, Fellowship and Order Commission, chaired by Rev. Jenny Boyd Bull.

In 1989, UFMCC published the pamphlet, "Spiritual Strength for Survival: Finding Hope to be Fully Alive with HIV/AIDS." The pamphlet presents, in a Christian context, the ten principles found to be common among long-term survivors of HIV/AIDS. This pamphlet, written by Rev. Steve Pieters, has rapidly become one of the best-selling of all UFMCC resources.

In 1993, UFMCC published "The Spiritual Strength For Survival Support Group Manual," also by Rev. Pieters. This booklet is a ready-to-use church program, which provides persons living with HIV/AIDS a spiritually-based support group. Many such groups have sprung up around the Fellowship since 1989, when the pamphlet was first published. The manual uses the experiences of many of these groups and their facilitators.

An important Fellowship resource for many AIDS Ministry personnel has been "ALERT," the monthly newsletter on AIDS, published regularly since November, 1987. Many MCC's AIDS ministries have been profiled, and many others have used these articles to create their own AIDS ministries. As of this writing, UFMCC is the only U.S. denomination with a monthly newsletter on AIDS, and one of only two denominations with a full-time staff person working exclusively on HIV/AIDS issues.

UFMCC AIDS SURVEYS

UFMCC AIDS Ministry has conducted two AIDS surveys of the UFMCC, first in 1990, and then in 1992. According to these surveys, the demographics of HIV/AIDS in the Fellowship have reflected the demographics of HIV/AIDS in the industrialized world. The numbers have increased dramatically in the early nineties, with increasing numbers of women with HIV and a disproportionate number of persons of colors being diagnosed.

The death toll among the clergy and lay leadership of the Fellowship has also increased rapidly in the early nineties. As of the writing of this document, in November, 1993, the UFMCC has lost the following leaders (including spouses of clergy) to the complications of HIV/AIDS:

Mr. Phillip Gallnitz
Mr. Dean Sandmire
Rev. David Callentine
Rev. Elder Jim Sandmire
Rev. John Feagan
Rev. Roger Webb
Rev. Brad AnderSon
Rev. Ron Bergeron
Rev. Jim Harris
Rev. Ron Russell-Coons
Rev. Emmett Watkins
Dr. Gary McLelland
Rev. Rick Weatherley
Mr. Lee Bush
Mr. Jim Hohman
Mr. Carl Magill-Knittig
Rev. Howard Wells
Mr. Paul Moore
Rev. Robert Pierce
Mr. Fred McVey
Mr. Larry Boyd
Rev. Ernie Edwards
Mr. Victor Pass
Elder Michael Mank
Rev. Bruce Hill
Rev. Jack Herman
Mr. Sean-Patrick Hogan
Rev. Wayne Gollihar
Rev. David Eckert
Mr. William Mertes
Mr. Alan Robertson
Rev. David Presley
Rev. Bill Coulter
Rev. Stan Roberts
Rev. Thomas Walker
Rev. Arthur Green
Mr. Mitch Samuels
Mr. Wayne Fessler
Rev. Larry Dunlap
Rev. Brian Hanlon
Rev. Frank Crouch
Rev. Ken Bland

In addition, it is estimated that well over 6,000 members of MCC have died from the complications of HIV/AIDS; and it is known that at least 6,000 more members are living with HIV/AIDS.

